



## LEAF Marque Remote Audit Protocol

In recognition that coronavirus (COVID-19) has severely comprised Certification Bodies (CBs) in their capacity to safely conduct LEAF Marque audits, an interim COVID-19 policy has been implemented to temporarily suspend all on-site LEAF Marque audits. CBs can continue to send certificate extension requests to LEAF Marque, with extensions of up to six months being granted if sufficient evidence is provided. This aligns with clause 3.2 in the [LEAF Marque System Rules](#) (v4).

In order to ensure LEAF Marque certified businesses can continue to maintain their assurance status, LEAF Marque has developed this remote auditing protocol to be implemented during the COVID-19 crisis. This audit has been developed to enable robust assessments of compliance which continue to support the credibility of the LEAF Marque System.

### Remote Auditing Process

#### **CBs send certification extension requests to LEAF Marque.**

Certificates can be extended up to 6 months on approval by LEAF Marque. The CB must provide evidence that the audit is not possible due to COVID-19 and request the appropriate time period for the certificate extension.

Certificate extension requests cannot be made more than a month in advance of the certificate expiry date due to the rapidly changing nature of COVID-19 restrictions and limitations.

#### **CBs determine whether a remote audit is appropriate.**

CBs are responsible for assessing the capacity and risk of a remote audit on a case-by-case basis for each business. Reasons a remote audit would not be appropriate include, but are not limited to:

- The non-conformance or membership history of a LEAF Marque certified business is considered too high risk to conduct a remote audit.
- The LEAF Marque certified business does not have access to or ability to use the technology required to conduct a robust remote audit.
- COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions are lifted during the extension period so that on-site audits are possible to safely complete. LEAF Marque must confirm the interim COVID-19 policy has been lifted and grant permission for audits to recommence.

New applicants to the LEAF Marque System are eligible for remote audits. However, this must be supplemented by an on-site verification assessment as soon as is safely possible. When assessing the capacity and risk of an audit, considerations should include the businesses access to technology and if the CB is aware of an extensive non-conformance (NC) history against other baseline certification systems. Excluding certificate extensions, all other procedures in this protocol apply. See **New Applicants - On-Site Verification** for more information.

#### **CBs determine the format and scheduling of the remote audit.**

The preferred format of a remote audit is a video call supplemented by the business providing documentary evidence. Any technology that can include at least 3 parties can be used in order to enable remote witnessing of audits – for example, WhatsApp Call, BlueJeans, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom.

If this is not possible, the audit can involve a phone call supplemented by the business providing documentary and photo/video evidence.

As with an on-site audit, CBs must allocate auditors appropriately and ensure they have access to the



information required to complete the audit. The auditor (or CB if appropriate) must contact the business and arrange a time for the remote audit. This must include a defined time period for the business to provide evidence (see below), and the time the video/phone call will take place.

LEAF Marque remote audits can occur as a stand-alone audit or at the same time as the LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system(s) audit, providing the baseline audit is also conducted remotely.

**Prior to the remote audit, the business uploads evidence via the LEAF Marque Data Room.**

The type and range of evidence uploaded by businesses will depend on whether the remote audit involves a video call or phone call, and the relevant verifications options available to each business.

LEAF Marque have developed the Evidence for Remote Audits spreadsheet, which identifies what evidence is required and the alternatives available for each Control Point. This corresponds with the method in which businesses upload information, which is via the LEAF Marque Data Room. Within the spreadsheet, the following information applies:

- Evidence that is documentary, photo's or videos must be submitted by businesses via the LEAF Marque Remote Audit Data Room. The exception to this is for documents that businesses opt-in to sharing via the LEAF Sustainable Farming Review (LSFR) Profile Report (e.g. management plans, risk assessments). The LSFR Profile Report is a PDF which includes management plans, policies and risk assessments uploaded by members during completion of their LSFR. Certification Bodies can download this prior to the audit via myLEAF.
- Discussion refers to either video calls or phone calls, but video calls are the preferred form of evidence. Where Video Call OR Phone Call is stated, Phone Call can only be accepted if the evidence stated in Column I beginning "IF PHONE CALL" is also provided. Unless "IF PHONE CALL" is stated, evidence in Column I is optional.
- Documents can be reviewed through video call format if the connection and visibility is clear enough to enable the auditor to review information within the documents. Upload of documents where possible is preferred.

CBs will only have access to information uploaded by their own LEAF Marque clients, and not to LEAF Marque certified businesses who have contracts with different CBs. It is the CBs responsibility to ensure the information uploaded by the business is accessible to the auditor and that data protection rights are maintained. The assigned auditor must review this information prior to the remote audit in order to inform the conversation and enable the audit to be conducted as efficiently as possible.

**Auditors complete the remote audit**

Compliance against each Control Point is assessed by the combined evidence obtained from the video/phone call and the relevant information uploaded. This informs the certification decision, and as such, the remote audit results in completion of a recertification audit.

The certification decision and subsequent certification procedures are completed in the same way as on-site audits, as stated in the LEAF Marque System Rules and Certification Body Licence Agreement.



### **New Applicants - On-Site Verification**

Following new LEAF Marque applicants' remote audits, an on-site verification assessment must be completed as soon as is safely possible. The on-site verification is used to verify the conclusions of the remote audit, including review of Control Points in which NCs had been reported and resolved. On-site verifications should focus on, but are not limited to, assessment of Control Points with 'Observe' verification icons. Additional Control Points can be reviewed where the auditor identifies aspects of high risk or where further verification is needed to support the certification decision. The business' fee for the on-site verification should reflect the reduced scope for the assessment comparative to a full on-site audit.

If the on-site verification identifies no evidence to contradict the positive certification decision, the businesses LEAF Marque certificate remains valid. The certificate end date issued in the initial certification decision remains the same and does not change to reflect the date of the on-site verification.

If the on-site verification identifies any NCs that contradict the positive certification decision, the certificate must be suspended immediately. The business must be informed of the NC(s) and given 28 days for evidence to be submitted for their resolution. If resolved, the certificate status can be changed to 'Current', but the certificate end date from the initial certification decision remains the same verification. If the NC(s) are not resolved within 28 days, the certificate must be withdrawn. The business must apply for another audit if they wish to achieve LEAF Marque certification.